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SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICAN ENVIRONMENT, SCIENCE, AND TECHNOLOGY MONTHLY BRIEFINGS, OCTOBER 2008

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1. (U) Summary: This is the South African Environment, Science and Technology Monthly Briefings Newsletter, October 2008, Volume 3, Number 10, prepared by the U.S. Embassy Pretoria, South Africa.

Topics of the newsletter:

- LOCAL COMMUNITY GROUPS FIGHT SOUTH DURBAN PETROLEUM PIPELINE
- SOUTHERN AFRICA AUCTIONS IVORY TO CHINA, JAPAN
- SOUTH AFRICAN SCIENTISTS SCOOP TOP INTERNATIONAL AWARDS
- ROBBEN ISLAND TO CULL 10,000 RABBITS
- SOUTH AFRICANS VIEW CLIMATE CHANGE AS DISTANT THREAT
- DME TO BEGIN REHABILITATE DEFUNCT MINES
- MERCURY CONTAMINATES DAMS IN KZN
- POLLUTION THREATENS SOUTH AFRICAN COASTLINES
- COMPANIES SET ASIDE LAND TO PRESERVE GRASSLANDS
- JOHANNESBURG UPGRADES WATER SERVICES
- SOUTH AFRICA TO CREATE DIGITAL REEF ATLAS
- MONTHLY FACTOID

Local Community Groups Fight
South Durban Petroleum Pipeline

2. (U) South Durban community groups object to Transnet's plan to establish a pipeline to transport petroleum products from coastal refineries to inland locations. Durban South Communities Environmental Alliance (SDCEA) representative Desmond D'sa noted that there is heavy air pollution in local communities, and that fifteen other conduit pipelines already pass through this area. D'sa said that these pipelines carry hazardous products such as benzene, putting South Durban residents at risk for asthma or cancer. D'sa added that over forty pipeline leaks have been recorded in South Durban since 1995. Transnet Public Relations Manager Saret Knoetze said her company wants to build the pipeline to deal with increased inland demand for petroleum products. She advised that Transnet had consulted with all relevant parties including SDCEA, and emphasized that Transnet felt it had obtained a balanced and sound environmental evaluation. SDCEA has threatened to file suit to stop the proposed pipeline project.

13. (U) The first global legal ivory sales in nearly a decade were held in late October at a special auction after the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) authorized four African countries to make a once-off sale of 108 tons of ivory to Chinese and Japanese buyers. China and Japan are the world's largest markets for ivory, which is used for handicrafts and for families' traditional seals to stamp documents. South Africa will hold the biggest sale (51 tons), followed by Botswana (44 tons), Namibia (9 tons) and Zimbabwe (4 tons). The ivory can only be sold to China and Japan, which then must track it to prevent it from being resold overseas.

14. (U) CITES officials state they agreed to the once-off sale only if sales were limited to those African countries with healthy elephant populations. More than 312,000 elephants live in Southern Africa. CITES officials also advised that most tusks were taken from elephants that died from natural causes or from culling of herds. The auctions, which are closed to the public and to media, will sell only tusks from government stocks. CITES Secretary General Willem Wijnstekers will supervise the sales. He will also meet with Chinese and Japanese authorities regarding measures to monitor the ivory after the sale. Profits from the sales must go toward elephant conservation projects, or toward programs aimed at developing communities that live around elephant ranges.

15. (U) Some conservationists fear that the arrival of so much legal ivory on the Chinese and Japanese markets would provide poachers with an opportunity to smuggle illegal ivory past regulators. International Fund for Animal Welfare Elephant Program Head Michael Wamithi said China and Japan are the top destinations for illegal ivory from poached elephants. Wamithi said: "Several multiple-ton seizures have been made at Chinese ports in recent years. The lack

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of enforcement for the registration systems in both countries provides a convenient loophole for illegal traders." Wildlife trade watchdog NGO Traffic said it has confidence in the auctions.

16. (U) Traffic South Africa National Representative David Newton said, "As far as we're concerned, it's a well-managed process." Newton added that Traffic believed China had made efforts to comply with international ivory trade regulations. He stated, "We're always urging caution, and the ivory trade needs to be very strictly managed. For the one-off trade, we're confident that the monitoring mechanisms are in place." International ivory trade was banned in 1989. CITES authorized South Africa, Botswana, Namibia and Zimbabwe to carry out occasional sales beginning in 1997 because CITES believes elephant populations in those countries are strong. The last sale in 1999 earned five million dollars. The four countries agreed not to hold a new sale for at least another nine years.

South African Scientists Scoop
Top International Awards

17. (U) South African scientists won first and third places in the 2008 UN Environmental Programs (UNEP) Thesis Award on Migratory Species Conservation. World Wildlife Fund (WWF - SA) biologist Dr. Samantha Petersen took first place for her research on "Understanding and Mitigating Vulnerable By-catch in Southern African Trawl and Long-line Fisheries". That study focused on the South African commercial fishing industry's impact on migratory seabirds, sea turtles and sharks. Bird Life International's Dr. Ross Wanless won third place for his investigation on the decline of seabirds on South Africa's Gough Island. Dr. Wanless' research revealed that mice were attacking and eating albatross chicks. The competition included thirty-two candidates from eighteen other countries. Second place was won by Dr. Lin Xia for his research on the impact of traffic on Tibetan antelope migration. WWF-SA Chief Executive Officer Dr. Morne Du Plessis noted the awards demonstrated

"not only the scientific expertise of WWF in South Africa, but also the growing concern over the impact of human activity on marine resources".

Robben Island to Cull 10,000 Rabbits

18. (U) Robben Island authorities are calling for culling over 10,000 rabbits on the island, beginning in November 2008. The rabbit population has increased exponentially, however the lack of rainfall and natural water sources has led to animal starvation. A fourteen-member Robben Island Museum Council decided to recommend culling after year-long deliberations with interested parties including environmental and animal rights groups and the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism. Robben Island Museum Acting CEO Seelan Naidoo said the decision to cull was difficult and emotionally charged. He added that culling would not be a pleasant task; however, it was the most effective method of dealing with the problem. Naidoo said rabbits and other island animals were starving, and were being run over by vehicles. Other animals to be culled include feral cats and fallow deer. Naidoo added that the workers who were involved in the culling project may need emotional counseling after the project is completed because they are supposed to be protecting animals and not culling them.

South Africans View Climate Change
as a Distant Threat

19. (U) The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) 2007 South African Social Attitudes Survey revealed that 72% of the survey participants knew what global warming was with 44% more worried about the issue than they had been a year ago. Seventy-one percent of South Africans regard global climate change as a very serious or somewhat serious threat compared to 95% of Brazilians and 90% of Britons, Canadians and Indians. Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) researcher John Seager noted that although many South Africans know about climate change, they regard it as a "distant threat." He said most South Africans are reluctant to pay the costs associated with curbing greenhouse emissions. Seager added that for South Africans the environment is number ten on a list of the most important challenges facing South Africa, behind unemployment, HIV/AIDS, poverty and other economic issues. Seager said: "If you're not sure where your next meal is coming from, that is more pressing than something that will affect future generations." Seager noted that South Africans do support government expenditures on developing

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renewable energies.

DME to Begin Rehabilitating Defunct Mines

110. (U) Department of Minerals and Energy (DME) Chief Director of Economic Analysis Tseko Nell said this week that mining activities have resulted in "disastrous environmental acts." Nell noted that mining is the leading generator of solid waste, and that this waste has both direct and indirect impacts on air, biological, water resources and land. DME is spending millions of rand to rehabilitate and manage derelict South African mines to which no owners lay claim. Nell said the DME has commissioned the Council for Geo-Science to develop a national strategy to manage abandoned mines. The Council will develop a methodology to allow DME to create and maintain a derelict mine database, and will rank the mines in the order of their negative impact on the environment, health, and safety of local communities. Nell said DME is also developing a strategy for regional mine closures.

Mercury Contaminates Dams in KZN

¶11. (U) The Kwa-Zulu Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs (DAEA) is investigating dams reported to be contaminated by mercury. DAEA spokesman Thami Ngidi said his department was inspecting the dams, some of which supply water to the cities of Durban (eThekweni) and Pietermaritzburg, to determine the source and levels of contamination. Ngidi added that Durban and Pietermaritzburg's water remains safe to drink, although they are treating the matter as an "urgent issue". The South African Medical Research Council released results of a study assessing community exposure to mercury for those living near the Inanda Dam; that study showed high levels of mercury in hair samples taken from villagers in the area.

Pollution Threatens South African Coastlines

¶12. (U) The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism's (DEAT) Marine Coastal Management (MCM) unit released a report that 65 percent of South Africa's coastline is polluted, with twelve percent at a critical stage. Sewage discharges into estuaries and oceans have dramatically increased since 1991. Populations along the coast have doubled; 128,800 cubic meters of waste water are pumped into the ocean every day by the mining industry; and there are rising concerns about toxic chemicals and malfunctioning sewage pump stations. The study, which compared 1994 litter collections with 2005 collections, found a 184% increase in medical and sewage waste, a 171% increase in plastic lids, a 157% increase in packaging and single-use items, and an 88% increase in floating recreational litter.

¶13. (U) MCM Director Dr Monde Mayekiso said DEAT will begin a major clampdown against marine polluters. Suggested courses of action include introducing new legislation, enacting a comprehensive monitoring program, and the possible introduction of new marine-protected areas. DEAT Head of Marine Pollution Dr. Yazeed Petersen said DEAT will also launch a cleanup campaign targeting major land-based polluters. Petersen said, "Eighty percent of all marine pollution can be linked to some kind of land-based activity. In total, we have identified 14 or 15 such activities or direct causes". Petersen noted that South African beaches and bays remain relatively clean compared to those found in other parts of the world, especially in the northern hemisphere.

Companies Set Aside Land to Preserve Grasslands

¶14. (U) Eight South African forestry companies have allocated 45,000 hectares of grasslands at 37 sites in the Mpumalanga and Kwa-Zulu Natal (KZN) provinces as nature reserves or protected land. The grasslands are the second largest biome after the Western Cape's fynbos biome. The grasslands biome currently accounts for less than three percent of protected land, but will increase to about five percent when these grasslands are allocated. Grasslands Program Spokesman Steve Germishuizen said South African grasslands have always been overlooked. He noted that grasslands have been ploughed over by farmers, planted over with alien species by foresters and destroyed by the commercial industry. The recently-established Grasslands Program will increase the number of protected grasslands,

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especially the highly-threatened "mist belt grasslands" in KZN and Mpumalanga provinces. Germishuizen said agriculture and forestry had the biggest impact on the grasslands. Germishuizen noted that one in seven grasslands is actually grass; the rest are species in the bulbs, geophytes and flowering plants. Over 100 species exist in any 10-square-meter area, with extensive networks of roots over 100 years old. Germishuizen said that his organization would work with the provincial conservation agencies and tribal authorities on the 37 sites, over the next five years to improve grassland management capacity and protect endemic species found on the lands.

Johannesburg Upgrades Water Services

¶15. (U) Johannesburg Water launched a R15 million (\$1.5) million upgrade project for the Ferndale area on October 6, 2008. MD Gerlad Dumnas noted that "SA is a water scarce country" and advised that Johannesburg Water is also launching water conservation education programs to the public and in schools. In fiscal year 2008/9, Johannesburg Water will spend R471 million (US \$4.7M) on upgrading the city's water infrastructure, which is about 50 years old. Ferndale is prioritized because there have been 43 burst pipes in that area in the past year. The upgrades consist of replacing the old asbestos cement pipes with new high impact pipes. One hundred and sixteen kilometers of pipes have already been replaced in Soweto. Water supply systems have also been improved in Diepsloot and Fourways, and new sewer network infrastructures are scheduled for Diepsloot, a sprawling township outside Fourways. A R 22 million (US \$ 2 M) project in the Ransburg area will be completed by the end of October.

South Africa to Create Digital Reef Atlas

¶16. (U) South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) Reef Atlas Program Project Manager Prideel Majiedt announced a new project to create South Africa's first-ever reef atlas, showing the distribution of reef types in South African waters. Majiedt said, "South Africa is one of the few countries where you get cold water corals, soft corals and subtropical corals on one coastline. Some species are found only in South Africa and it's our global responsibility to look after them." She added that measures such as the Reef Atlas are vital in planning for oceanographic changes brought on by climate change and to protect coral reefs from accidental damage by the fishing industry. Little is known about South Africa's coral reefs because most research has focused on terrestrial eco-systems. Majiedt said SANBI believed many reefs are threatened, but lacked scientific knowledge regarding where those reefs are located, how threatened they are, and what the actual threats are to each reef.

¶17. (U) Majiedt noted that activities change depending on the coastline in South Africa. She said: "On the West Coast there's a lot of fishing, on the East Coast pipelines, on the South Coast oil and gas mining, and diamond mining in the north-west. By mapping all of these uses, we can partition the ocean in such a way that everyone gets to benefit." The program encourages divers to submit photographs of reefs, kelp beds and ship wrecks. Majiedt advised that response has been slow because some dive shops are "very protective of their information because they have the GPS co-ordinates, which is the lifeblood of the industry - they have secret spots they take their customers to." Majiedt says that SANBI will not make those co-ordinates publicly available "to ensure the protection of vulnerable reef habitats and protection of the information shared by divers."

Monthly Factoid

¶18. (U) The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism has secured an investment of R500 million (\$50 million) over the next three years to ensure that all South African national parks are exemplary energy-efficient showcases. South Africa Yearbook 2007/8

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